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DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT TAUNTON, SEPT. 3, 1793,

BEFORE THE
SOCIETY OF UNITARIAN CHRISTIANS,

ESTABLISHED IN THE WEST OF ENGLAND,

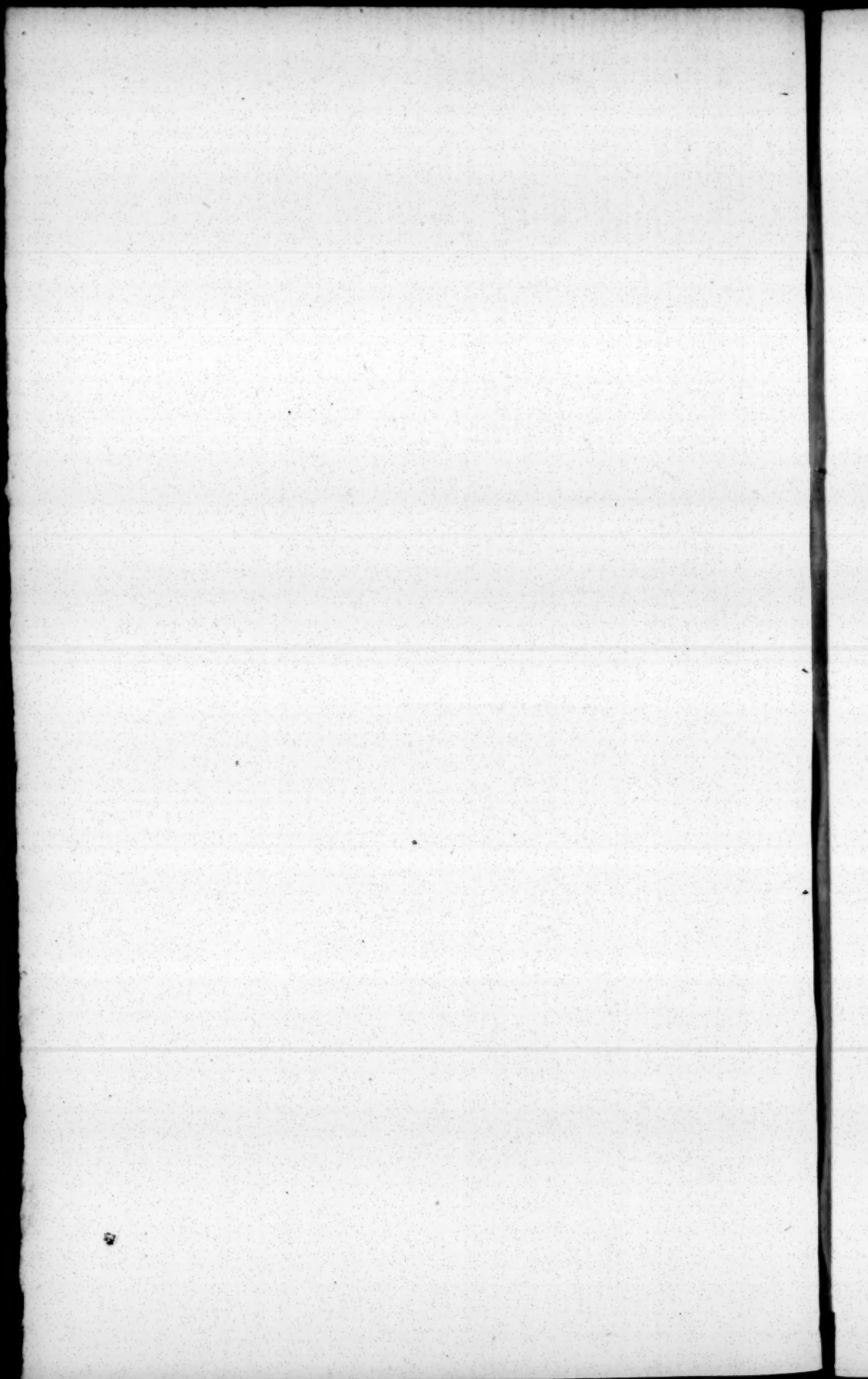
FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE AND
THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUE BY THE
DISTRIBUTION OF BOOKS.

By T. KENRICK.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. MAT. xiii. 33.

L O N D O N:

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MATTHEW xiii. 33. *Another Parable spake he unto them: The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

CHRIST delivered this parable for the encouragement of his disciples. He had been employed in instructing them in the nature of the kingdom which he came to establish, and had already sent them out to announce its approach. But the Apostles, apprehending it to be of a temporal nature, and imagining, in common with the rest of their countrymen, that all extraordinary divine favours were to be confined to the Jews, never conceived, that this kingdom was to be extended beyond the limits of Judæa: nor could they see, that there was much probability of its arriving even at this degree of extent. Twelve men, such as they were, without learning, power, or authority, seemed but ill qualified for spreading the new doctrine throughout so large a country, in opposition to established opinions and all the influence of the great: still less, did they appear prepared for propagating it throughout the world. They, who were reprehended so often for their want of faith in other instances, would probably feel no great confidence in regard

to this subject, where, according to human apprehension, there appeared to be so little prospect of success. To strengthen their hopes of the general prevalence of the Gospel, Jesus assures them, that, as in the natural world great changes arise from small and inconsiderable causes, a little leaven pervading and fermenting a large mass, so it would likewise be in regard to his doctrine and the number of his disciples—that the doctrine should spread, until it was diffused over every quarter of the globe, and his disciples increase from a small and inconsiderable number, until they included the whole human race.

This parable, therefore, may be considered as prophetic, foretelling a grand event, which has not yet been accomplished, but will one day certainly take place, the universal prevalence of the Christian religion; of which we have likewise clear intimations in the prophetic writings of Scripture. The stone, which smote Nebuchadnezzar's image, and was intended to represent a kingdom the God of Heaven would set up, *is to become a great mountain, and to fill the whole earth* (a). The prophet Isaiah tells us, *that it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it* (b) : and Malachi, *that from the rising of the sun even to the going down*

(a) Dan. ii. 34, 35, 44.

(b) If. ii. 2.

of the same, the name of God shall be great among the Gentiles (c).

The language of Christ in the text may be considered not only as prophetic of a great event, but likewise as intimating in what manner it is to be accomplished—not instantaneously and tumultuously, but gradually and secretly, as that substance operates, to which the kingdom of Heaven is compared: for when Christ has recourse to the same simile upon another occasion, there is evidently an allusion to this property, Mat. xvi. 6. where, cautioning his disciples against the doctrines of the two prevailing sects among the Jews, he tells them *to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees*, intimating, that their doctrine was not only pernicious, but also of a subtle and insinuating nature, pervading men's minds before they were aware. In like manner, Christ may here intend to declare, that the advancement of his religion in the world would be by imperceptible degrees, until it had extended itself throughout the whole mass of mankind. The progress both of truth and error is nearly alike; but there is this difference between them, the spreading of the one is partial and temporary; that of the other, universal and eternal—the one reaches to one portion of the globe, or to one age of the world; the other to every country under Heaven, and to every future period of time.

(c) Mal. i. 11.

Such, we have reason to hope, will be the issue of things in regard to those two important truths, the unity of the divine being and the humanity of Christ. God has (for reasons which are no doubt wise and good, though not obvious to us) suffered these doctrines to be corrupted and lost, in almost every part of the Christian world. The virtuous struggles of those, who have attempted to withstand the progress of error, or to restore the original truth, have proved both alike unsuccessful. The advocates for a plurality of gods, or of objects of religious worship, have long had and still continue to have on their side the weight of numbers, the influence of riches, and the power of civil government; while the defenders of the strict unity of God are few, despised, and persecuted. In this country, in particular, they are liable, for making an open profession of their sentiments, to penalties, which rank them with apostates from the Christian faith, and, if enforced, would deprive them of the best rights of society.

But the benevolence of the Divine Being will not, we have reason to believe, permit him to suffer things to remain in this condition—to let truth be thus degraded and error triumphant. A period will certainly come for the revival of the truth, and for diffusing it again, throughout the world. Permit me to hope for your indulgence, while I endeavour to shew, that that period is probably arrived—I say *probably* arrived—for so little capable are we of interpreting

interpreting the divine purposes from any present appearances, that it would be presumption in us to pretend to be *certain* of the immediate approach of such an event. It will be sufficient to justify our expectation of it, if circumstances be more promising than at any former period; which I shall now attempt to prove. Should this be satisfactorily demonstrated, it will open a pleasing prospect to an infant-society, which is formed principally with the view of spreading the knowledge of the important truths before mentioned, and furnish each individual of our body with powerful encouragement for exertion.

The expectation that the doctrine of the humanity of Christ will speedily prevail in the world, seems to be justified by the simplicity to which it is now reduced; by the conduct of those, who embrace it, in making an open profession of their faith; and by the temper and circumstances of their opponents.

More than two hundred years have now elapsed since this important doctrine was revived in the Christian world. About the period of the Reformation from Popery, there appeared several learned and able advocates, who ventured to defend it, and drew after them many followers. Separate churches of persons, who professed this principle, were formed in different parts of Europe, but more especially in Poland, whither they were induced to resort, on account of the religious liberty,

liberty, which they were permitted to enjoy in that kingdom. Persons of the first rank in society among the Poles joined themselves to them, or afforded them protection. Their societies became numerous, and they seemed to have obtained a lasting establishment, but this flourishing state of things did not continue long. A decree was obtained by their enemies for banishing them all from the kingdom, which was executed with the greatest severity. Their societies were broken up, and the members obliged to take refuge in other countries. From this period permanent congregations of believers in the humanity of Christ, notwithstanding several attempts to establish them, have been, until the present times, unknown in Europe, if we except a few churches in Prussia and Transylvania, which are said to have subsisted there from the time of the Reformation. Some individuals, however, dispersed through different countries, still continued to maintain this doctrine; but as a distinct sect of Christians having separate places of worship they had no existence (*d*).

As

(*d*) Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. Vol. IV. p. 178, &c. Vol. V. p. 51, &c.

Ab eo tempore (scil. 1658) maximè in Transylvania seita sua publicè propagarunt; sed & aliis locis partim tectiores, partim apertè nostrâ ætate commendarunt sententias suas. Schroeckhii Hist. Reb. & Eccl. Christ. 1785. p. 299.

A gen-

As the first attempt, in modern times, to propagate the doctrine of the divine unity and the
humanity

A gentleman well acquainted with the German language has favoured me with the following account of the Unitarians of Prussia and Transylvania, translated from Schlegel's *Eccles. Hist. of the eighteenth century*, published in German at Heilbron, in 1788, in 2 Vol. 8vo.

The history of the Antitrinitarians of the present century is rather the history of individuals, and of the places and countries where they have propagated their doctrines, than of the creed they profess, which, in the main, continues unaltered. In Poland, their ancient residence, they were formerly very numerous, but, at present, owing to their congregations having in the last century been dispersed and broken up, their number is very small, and these few, to avoid punishment, must keep themselves private. In Prussia (whither they emigrated from the adjoining Poland) they have still two congregations—at Rudau, in the district Rhein, and at Andreaſwalde, in the district Johannisburg, which are rather decreasing than increasing. One minister, whose salary is very scanty, serves both churches, and performs divine service in the room of a private dwelling-house; for they must avoid all appearance of publicly exercising their religion. Both congregations are reckoned to consist of barely a hundred souls. Some eminent families are, however, of their number, as the Schlichting, Morſtin family, and others.

The Socinians (or as they rather call themselves) the Unitarians of Transylvania have had, since the sixteenth century, the free exercise of their religion confirmed by the laws of the land. They are governed by Superintendants. Under the Superintendant, Mich. Almási, the church at Clausenburg, which had been granted them by Prince John the 2d, in 1570, was, with their college and printing-office,

humanity of Christ was thus defeated, it may be apprehended that we have no better prospect of success at the present moment: and this apprehension would appear to be well founded, if we were placed in like circumstances, and had the same difficulties to contend with as they had. But if it can be shown, that many former obstacles are removed, and that we enjoy several advantages for propagating the truth, which our predecessors had not, the want of success, on past occasions, can furnish no just ground for despair now.

The decline of this sect of Christians, after having been in so flourishing a condition, has

office, taken from them in 1716, by order of the Emperor Charles the 6th, and given to the Jesuits. At the same time they were deprived of their very flourishing church and school at Weissemburg. The present Superintendent is the eighteenth Transylvanian Superintendent; he is an upright and humane man, and daily teaches divinity in the college of the Unitarians, who even now have good schools both here and at Torda. They still enjoy the free exercise of their religion, but are not now admitted to posts of honour as formerly, when they belonged to the Grand Council for managing the affairs of the land, and to other courts of justice. Their chief teachers in churches and schools study in foreign universities; especially in Holland, where they have many friends, particularly among the Remonstrants. Their number even now is estimated at thirty thousand souls. Their present creed does not differ from that which the Polish Unitarians laid before Frederic I. King of Prussia. That party which rejected the worship of Christ is not now to be found amongst them.

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been attributed to the violent methods which were employed to check the growth of their principles, all parties, Papists, Calvinists, and Lutherans uniting their efforts against them as a common enemy, and having recourse to the most savage barbarities, which ever stained the hands of persecutors; but to inflict tortures and death upon men for their religious principles, has been hitherto found to strengthen the attachment of survivors, rather than weaken it, and to increase the number of proselytes, rather than diminish them. A better reason for this decline may, I apprehend, be found in the principles maintained by them.

The most distinguished leader of this class of Christians, from whom they have been denominated, because supposed to embrace his sentiments, had joined to his idea of Christ being a Man, while in the world, certain notions of his exaltation and dignity after his ascension into Heaven, totally irreconcilable with the first part of his hypothesis; and such as raised one, whom he esteemed to be a man, to a level with the Supreme Being. It is well known, that Socinus considered Christ in Heaven as invested with absolute power over all men, and over every part of the universe, for every purpose, that might be connected with the prosperity of the church in general or of individual members; and that he regarded him as a proper object of religious worship, to whom we might address petitions for such mercies as we
want,

want, and thanksgiving for those we have received (*e*).

This part of his system must strike thinking persons as attended with great difficulties, and create insurmountable obstacles to its reception. I shall give you the opinion of two eminent persons on this subject, as they delivered them at the distance of near a century from each other; the one a Clergyman of the church of England, possessed of the highest ecclesiastical dignity which this country affords; the other a Dissenting Minister, by no means inferior to him in talents, virtue and reputation; the one an Arian, the other a believer in the doctrine of the Trinity.

“ Let us now see, says Archbishop Tillotson,
 “ whether the opinion of our adversaries hath not
 “ greater difficulties in it, and more palpable absurdities following from it. They say, that the
 “ Son of God is a mere creature; not God by
 “ nature, and yet truly and really God by office,
 “ and by Divine appointment and constitution;
 “ to whom the very same honour and worship is
 “ to be given, which we give to him who is God
 “ by nature.

“ And can they discern no difficulty, no absurdity in this? What, no absurdity in bringing idolatry by a back door into the Christian religion? one main design whereof was to
 “ banish idolatry out of the world; and will they
 (*e*) Toulmin's Mem. of Socinus, p. 179, 180, *ibid.* 200,

“ in earnest contest this matter with us, that the
 “ giving divine worship to a mere creature is not
 “ idolatry? and can they vindicate themselves in
 “ this point any other way, than will, in a great
 “ measure, acquit the Pagans and Papists from
 “ the charge of idolatry?

“ What? no absurdity in a God, as it were,
 “ of yesterday? in a creature God? in a God
 “ merely by positive institution? and this in op-
 “ position to a plain moral precept of eternal ob-
 “ ligation, and to the fixed and immutable nature
 “ of things? so that, to avoid the shadow and
 “ appearance of a plurality of deities, they really
 “ run into it; and, for ought I can see, into
 “ downright idolatry, by worshipping a creature
 “ besides the Creator, who is blessed for ever.” (f)

So forcibly does the Archbishop reason against the system of Socinus in regard to the worship of Jesus Christ, without being aware, that the like objections might be urged with equal force against his own faith.

To suppose that a man, made as no other man was, for performing no other service than what a man might have performed, should be exalted, above every creature in the universe, should reign over all nature, and become the proper object of religious worship, is, in the apprehension of Dr. Price, an advancement so sudden and astonishing, that there is nothing in Athanasianism itself more

(f) Tillotson's Works, Vol. I. Sermon 44, p. 429.

extravagant. This doctrine, according to him, not only renders the Scriptures unintelligible, but Christianity itself incredible (g).

Can we wonder, then, that a system, attended, in the judgment of thinking men of opposite religious persuasions, with so great difficulties, should find few who were prepared to embrace it at a period, when philosophy and learning had dawned upon the world, and when men began to exercise their reason even in religious matters? Can we be surprised, if, perceiving objections of nearly equal weight to two systems of faith, they should chuse to retain that in which they had been educated, and which appeared to be the most honourable to the Saviour?

Let us compare the doctrine in regard to Christ, which has been just stated, with that of the Unitarians of the present day—that Jesus Christ possessed the same nature as other men, if he was not produced by the same natural means; that he was superior to the prophets who went before him, in the perfection of his example, in the purity of his precepts, and in the extraordinary divine communications of knowledge and power that were made to him; and that, after his resurrection and ascension, he was exalted to a state of glory and honour in Heaven, but without any share in the government of the world or the

(g) Serm. on the Christ. Doctr. p. 128, 146, 150, 151.

church, except by means of his laws ; and we shall see nothing here, which shocks our understanding by its absurdity and inconsistency, nothing which obliges us to have recourse to *mystery* or the *weakness of human reason* to defend it, the usual refuge of men, who have to vindicate what is contradictory or incomprehensible ; but, on the contrary, what is intelligible and plain to the most ordinary understanding, perfectly corresponding with the past dispensations of religion to mankind, and with the future designs of Providence respecting good men. We have a prophet, like, in every respect, to other prophets, except in the superiority of his character and endowments, who is rewarded, after death, for his distinguished services, as some of them were without dying. Such a system as this is calculated to attract alike the attention and gain the approbation of the philosopher, who, disgusted with the absurd doctrines maintained by Christians, is hastening towards Deism, or has already fallen into it ; of the unlearned Christian, who is not prepared to build his faith upon the subtleties of metaphysics ; and of every man, who, in receiving articles of belief, is guided by the principles of reason, and not by the influence of education or authority. Such a system as this is likely to prevail in the world, if simplicity and consistency be any recommendation of a religious doctrine.

However, it is not merely because it is more agreeable to reason, that we have ground to hope for the prevalence of the doctrine of the humanity of Christ as it is now maintained, but likewise because it has been rendered more consonant to the language of the Scriptures. Much light has been thrown upon these sacred writings since the period of the Reformation, when this doctrine was revived, which has removed many former objections, and produced much fresh evidence in its support. By comparing together the various manuscript copies of the New Testament, learned men have detected several corruptions of the original text, in favour of the reigning system. The peculiar phraseology of Scripture, in regard to the person and office of Christ, has been more completely illustrated; not from the language of common life in modern times, by which men had been hitherto misled, but from the style of the East, and particularly from that of the sacred writers themselves. Texts of Scripture have been interpreted, not like so many independent sentences, as was frequently practised before, but from the general scope of the writer, which is the only proper method of ascertaining his meaning. By these means, and by more accurate translations of the original language, many passages of Scripture, which were once supposed to contain the strongest evidence of the Deity or pre-existence of Christ, and which occasioned no small perplexity and

and embarrassment to the advocates for the opposite doctrine, have been shewn to afford no proof of either, but, on the contrary, to be perfectly consistent with the idea of his being a man. What hopes of success may be derived from achievements of this kind, it is unnecessary to point out. We are in possession of all the strong holds once occupied by our adversaries. They are driven from the fortresses, to which they principally trusted for defence, and rendered incapable of making any further effectual resistance.

We possess another advantage also over our predecessors in this cause, which, as it will greatly facilitate the reception of the truth, deserves to be separately mentioned. If the doctrine of the humanity of Christ be the doctrine of the New Testament, it must have been the opinion of all those, who were instructed by the Apostles and first teachers of Christianity. And, as a large body of people do not change their opinions at once, nor without making some opposition, we might expect to find some traces of the original doctrine in early ages, and some evidence of the opposition made to those, who were attempting to introduce novelties. Agreeably to this expectation, it has been lately discovered by a distinguished individual, to whose indefatigable researches after truth, both in the natural and moral world, we are greatly indebted, that the Christians of the first ages after Christ were Unitarians

in sentiment, and that it was a long time before the common people, or unlearned Christians, who are always the last to receive new opinions, could be induced to receive a doctrine bearing any resemblance to the modern notion of the Trinity. The source of this ancient and grand corruption of Christianity has also been traced, and shewn to have originated in the prevailing philosophy of the times.

Since, then, we have reason, Scripture, and antiquity on our side, what ground can we have to fear any opposition, or to doubt the success of the cause, in which we are engaged? Had Protestants any better encouragement, when they separated from the church of Rome? Had *they* any stronger arguments to plead, than *we* have to offer? Has not the event fully justified them in concluding, that gross corruptions of the Gospel could not long withstand the principles of sound reasoning and the plain language of Revelation? And have not we good reason at the present day, (in attempting a like reformation in religion) for making the same conclusion, especially when we enjoy the additional advantage to be derived from the example of their success?

2dly. Good hopes of the prevalence of Unitarian principles may also be derived from the conduct of those, who embrace them, in making an open profession of the truth.

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That there has been a backwardness on the part of believers in the humanity of Christ to do this, cannot be denied; which may be attributed to various causes: thus, it may have proceeded, in many instances, from the want of a firm persuasion of the truth of that, which they were called to profess; and this again, from the great difficulties with which they found themselves heretofore embarrassed; for what men do not believe with confidence, they cannot profess with boldness, or be anxious to communicate to others. Slight obstacles, and especially the fear of danger or reproach, are in this case sufficient to repress their zeal. While some concealed their sentiments from doubts still existing in their minds about the truth of them, and from the fear of suffering; others have done it from motives of policy, conceiving that the cause of truth is hurt by a hasty disclosure, and that it is best promoted by keeping it back from the world, until men's prejudices be removed, and they can hear it without disgust. According to the apprehension of these, new opinions must be communicated to the world with infinite caution, as men are able to bear them; and the time was by no means yet come for being explicit upon this subject. Others again, observing that there are virtuous characters of equal excellence among men of different religious persuasions, have imagined, that it is of little consequence to Christians, what they believe
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in regard to what they call speculative opinions ; that in respect to the subject, of which we are now speaking in particular, it is a matter of indifference as to moral improvement, whether men conceive Jesus Christ to be God, equal in every respect to the Father, a great pre-existent spirit, or only a man ; whether they perform religious worship to one being, to two, or to three ; and consequently, that although they have no doubt in their own mind what the truth is, they have considered themselves at liberty to publish or conceal it, as they thought proper. From these motives many persons have, for a long time past, satisfied their minds with obtaining themselves the knowledge of what they deemed the truth, and taken no pains or shown little zeal to communicate it to their brethren. Such opinions as those now mentioned have proved a great obstruction to the progress of more liberal principles in religion, and afforded much advantage to those, who denied and opposed them ; for persons of the latter description, generally conceiving of the peculiar articles of their faith, as necessary to the salvation of mankind, and therefore of infinite moment, have esteemed themselves bound to profess and inculcate them with proportional earnestness. And in a contest of this kind, where one party is lukewarm or absolutely indifferent to the cause which they espouse, but the other is animated with the highest zeal, it is easy
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to perceive which will be the more successful one in gaining profelytes.

But more generous principles have been adopted, by Unitarians of modern times, respecting the importance of their sentiments, and their obligation to communicate them freely to the world. They regard the knowledge of truth in general as valuable, on account of the necessary connection which it has with the happiness of the human race, and religious truth as more so than any other, from its influence in promoting the moral improvement and comfort of mankind. Every just notion in religion, however inconsiderable it may appear, they consider in the same important light, as the philosopher views every new discovery in natural science, who regards it as important in itself or in its consequences, either enabling him to exercise new powers over the material world, and thereby add to the enjoyments, or lessen the evils of human life, or leading him to the discovery of other useful truths, to which it may stand related. In the same manner, they consider every religious truth as valuable, either on account of the direct influence, which it has in advancing the happiness of the human race, or from its connection with other truths, which have that tendency. And since one truth and one error is connected with another in endless progression, they regard it as the duty of every man, who would prove himself a friend

to mankind, and wishes to further the benevolent designs of Providence, to enquire after and communicate truth, to detect and expose error, by all the means in his power ; it becomes him, with this view, to make a public profession of what he believes to be true, as one of the most effectual means of calling the attention of mankind to his sentiments, and of inducing men to embrace them ; and to make this profession in the clearest manner, without any ambiguity or reserve, by words or actions, or both, as the case may require, in the face of all opposition, and to whatever evils and dangers the explicit avowal of the truth may expose him. To communicate the truth partially is, in their estimation, to do it injury, and to obstruct, rather than promote, its progress ; since it is never likely to be so well received as when it is fully known : to be deterred by the fear of danger from publishing any doctrine which we believe to be true, or a part of the gospel of Christ, is to prefer our own ease or safety to the general good of mankind, and to incur the guilt of being ashamed of Christ before men. These sentiments, concerning religious truth in general, are accompanied with a conviction of the particular importance of the doctrine of the Divine Unity, which they consider as the fundamental principle both of the Jewish and Christian religion ; conceiving that to offer divine worship, or to ascribe divine attributes to a creature, is a branch of that gross corrup-

corruption of religion, which, in scripture, is stigmatized with the appellation of idolatry; the introduction of which, in whatever form, has been the source of unspeakable mischiefs to the world. They are convinced, that to the deification and worship of Jesus Christ, they are to attribute the worship of Mary the mother of Jesus, the worship of angels, the worship of dead men and women without number, and last of all, the worship of a piece of bread, with an infinite number of superstitious rites and ceremonies, which such worship drew after it; that this one error, therefore, has been the principal source of all the other errors of the church of Rome.

While they entertain this opinion of the importance of truth, they find room for the exercise of candour towards those who are in error. They are persuaded that mistakes, which are involuntary, cannot be criminal, and that those, who have fallen into them, after diligent and impartial enquiry, are not the objects of divine wrath, but of tender compassion, and ought to be regarded with the same compassion by all those who are better informed. Every deviation from the truth must indeed be injurious to the happiness of men; but all deviations are not equally so, much less are all to be regarded as fatal to their everlasting welfare. A few important truths, firmly believed and carefully attended to, will counteract the destructive tendency of many errors.

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From men, who entertain such opinions of the nature of truth in general, and of the importance of the doctrine of the Divine Unity in particular, we may expect every exertion, which can be necessary to make it generally received by the world. For in such persons we find a firm conviction of the truth, an open profession of it in spite of all obstacles, and an earnest zeal for its propagation—a zeal too, not founded in vanity and the love of distinction, which excites disgust against the cause which it is employed to support, but proceeding from a generous concern for the welfare of the human race, and therefore amiable and conciliating.

But thirdly, the hope of success to the principles we support may be derived, as well from the temper and circumstances of our opponents, as from those of our friends and fellow-labourers.

Books upon every branch of science are multiplied. The number of readers is increasing. Knowledge must, therefore, be advancing and becoming more generally diffused. These are circumstances, which cannot fail to prove favourable to the cause which we have espoused: for men, who have been accustomed to exercise their reason upon one subject, will employ the same faculty in investigating another, if their attention should be directed towards it; and whenever they do this, there can be no doubt of the issue of their enquiries. The fear of losing the rich emoluments of an establishment, or of in-

curring the disgrace of being connected with a small and despised party, is indeed a strong temptation to avoid enquiry and to suppress the result of it. But we know from several recent examples, that these obstacles, powerful as they may be, are not sufficient to withstand the force of genuine virtue and integrity. We have seen persons resign honourable and lucrative situations in the church, because they could not join in worship addressed to any being besides the one God, and expose themselves to poverty and contempt, with all the fortitude of primitive Confessors. These are noble instances of the influence of truth on the human mind, and will no doubt induce many others to follow so excellent a pattern.

That state of things is the most unfavourable to the speedy progress of truth, in which the efforts of those who support it are viewed with perfect indifference; when their arguments are deemed so absurd or so impious, as to be incapable of doing mischief, or as not to deserve notice, and when therefore no opposition is made to them. In vain is it, in this case, that men preach, or write, or speak, in behalf of what they regard as important doctrines: they gain no attention, and can make no impression. But this is not the light, in which the doctrine, of which I have been speaking, is regarded at the present day. The writings of Unitarians, published in defence of their own principles, or for overthrowing those

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of their opponents, are read with attention by great numbers. Their arguments are deemed, at least plausible, and endeavours are made to answer them. Persons of no inconsiderable eminence, for their talents, learning or rank, have thought it an employment not unworthy of them to engage in this controversy, with a view to stop the progress of what they regard as dangerous error. The contests, which this opposition occasions, attract the attention of the world to the subject under discussion, and enable spectators to judge, while each party labours to exhibit his own opinion to most advantage, which is supported by the greatest strength of evidence, and which has truth on its side.

No inconsiderable symptoms have lately appeared, of a disposition to employ force to suppress the principles we profess, which is an evident proof of the fears entertained of their progress, and affords a strong presumption, that they will be more widely extended. By the inadequate redress given to those of this way of thinking, who suffered from the outrages committed by the populace, and a backwardness to punish the offenders, or to censure those who countenanced them, a strong inclination has manifested itself to deny them the protection of the laws. By refusing to repeal statutes, which inflict upon us some of the severest punishments known to our laws short of death, and to grant us the benefit of that tolera-
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tion, which is given to every other religious sect in this country, an attempt has been made to keep up a distinction between us and other Dissenters, as professing principles peculiarly dangerous to civil government. This treatment, which marks us out from the community as obnoxious persons, may be very unpleasant to individuals, but it may prove favourable to our cause, by exciting a greater degree of attention to *our* principles, than to those of other Dissenters, and hereby rendering them better understood.

Should our countrymen proceed to greater acts of injustice than those to which I have alluded, and actually inflict upon us all the penalties of these persecuting statutes, I may venture to foretell the like consequences in a still greater degree.

That the cause of truth, in this instance, will not receive the benefit of active persecution appears by no means certain. Were the present race of believers in the humanity of Christ less enlightened in mind, and not so blameless in their conduct, I might be able to assure them, that they would go to their graves in peace. But when I consider, that so great a proportion of them are upright and virtuous, and well furnished with knowledge, I can by no means be confident of their security; for such characters are the terror of bigots, and the objects of their implacable malice. From a licentious infidel or atheist they

apprehend they have little to fear ; their characters carry with them an antidote against their sentiments. But men, who believe the same Scriptures with themselves, whose temper is candid and conduct exemplary, are formidable antagonists, whom they cannot so easily withstand. It is not very improbable, if, when foiled in the use of the weapons of reason and argument against such opponents, they have recourse to violence.

Having mentioned such circumstances as seem to me to afford good ground to hope for the speedy prevalence of the two great doctrines, by which we are distinguished from other Christians, the Unity of God, and the Humanity of Christ, I shall make a few observations upon what I apprehend to be our duty, in the present situation of things. Most of these observations are naturally suggested by what has been already said ; for if the progress of just sentiments in religion has been obstructed by the causes before mentioned, it is evidently the duty of every one to endeavour to remove from his system of faith every thing which is inconsistent with the principles of reason, or contradicts the language of Scripture ; to make a public and undisguised profession of the truth ; and to employ every method in his power to direct men's attention to the subject.

It would be too soon to conclude, that our sentiments are entirely purified from all the dregs of Popery ; that there is nothing in them, either redundant

dundant or deficient, and that there is no part of Scripture with which they are at variance. Such a conclusion, at a moment, when we have just been obliged to give up so much, for which former believers in the humanity of Christ earnestly contended, might be deemed hasty and presumptuous. Those, who have taken most pains to enquire into the subject, find, notwithstanding they have no doubt of the truth of the system in general, that there are some difficulties, with which they are still embarrassed, some passages of Scripture, that have not yet been satisfactorily explained. While such obstacles remain in the way, they will necessarily retard the progress of truth, and prolong the dominion of error. Let every one, therefore, carefully apply himself to the study of the Scriptures, and endeavour to remove every difficulty which embarrasses his own mind, or is likely to prevent the reception of the truth by others.

One great cause of the aversion of men to embrace new principles in religion, has always been found to be a fear, that they may have an unfavourable influence upon the practice, that they may weaken the obligations of morality, or not enforce the duties of piety and benevolence so effectually as those, which they are urged to abandon. The connection between old principles and good morals is well known, or, at least, supposed to be well known; but what connection there may be between such as are new and a right

conduct, is not so obvious. While, therefore, men remain in this uncertainty, they are not willing to embrace them. It is indeed our duty to receive the truth, without regard to its consequences, believing that these must always be salutary. But there are many, who have not arrived at so much comprehension of mind, as to be able to act upon this principle : hence it is of great service to the cause of truth, to shew its practical and useful tendency. When this is done satisfactorily, it removes prejudices and suspicions from the minds of virtuous characters, whom it is most desirable to have rightly informed, but who are more liable than others to such fears.

This I understand to be one leading design of the Society, which you have instituted, by which you propose first, by the distribution of books, to expose the errors, entertained by Christians, in regard to several important articles of faith ; and then to shew, by moral treatises, from which they are excluded, and into which opposite principles are introduced, that the duties of virtue and piety may be enforced, with equal and even with better effect, without them. This last part of your scheme will answer the double purpose of removing the prejudices of those, who are at present averse to the truth, and of directing those, who have received it, how to apply it to the most useful purposes. But your design can be but imperfectly accomplished, at present, on account of
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the very small number of practical writings to be found in our language, which are not tinged with the prevailing system of theology. It may be hoped, however, that books of this description will soon be multiplied, as the demand for them increases, and the utility of them is perceived. To supply this deficiency, would be to render essential service to the cause of truth and the interests of morality.

It ought not, however, to be forgotten, that the same end may be attained (and perhaps more effectually) in another way. Let every one, who professes to believe in the strict Unity of God and Humanity of Christ, shew an exemplary attention to all the duties of life, by a spirit of genuine unaffected piety, by active benevolence and strict integrity, and it will do more to silence objections against obnoxious principles, and to recommend the truth, than the best written treatise upon morals that could come from his hands.

Some persons may not have so strong expectations of the prevalence of our principles, as I have endeavoured to shew there is good ground for entertaining. From them we may hear such language as this: "the times are unfavourable to
 " the propagation of our principles: the minds
 " of men are so much alarmed, or so strongly
 " prejudiced, that they are not likely to listen to
 " our arguments with patience: we are but few
 " in number, and it is but little that we can do
 " against

“ against so much opposition. Let us not attempt any thing, till Providence shall open a door for our labours, and the spirit of the times shall alter.” But allowing the times to be as unfavourable to our designs, as is here supposed, such language cannot be proper, even in the most unpromising times. For our obligation to make an open profession of the truth, and to endeavour to spread the knowledge of it in the world, does not depend upon the prospect we have of success. It is our duty to communicate to the world every degree of information we have acquired, whatever the effect may be, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear; whether Providence give it a greater or lesser degree of success. *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not which shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they shall be both alike good.* If any great change is to be wrought in the opinions of men, it must be accomplished, by means adapted to the end, and, therefore, by the instrumentality of men. Particular events, not under human controul, but under the direction of Providence, may retard or accelerate the work; but the success of it must depend, in a considerable degree, upon human exertion. Yet if no one be willing to perform the part allotted to man, we may rest assured, that it will not be accomplished. Until a trial, however, has been made, it is impossible for any
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one to know, in cases of this kind, whether his labours will be successful or not. It is his duty, therefore, to exert himself, in endeavouring to communicate knowledge to mankind, without enquiring what the event may be; and although he may have little or no hope, that what he may do will answer any valuable purpose.

If, however, the observations, made in the first part of this discourse, be just, we are not to consider ourselves, at present, in such circumstances of despondency, but, on the contrary, we are arrived at a grand period, for which Providence has been preparing the world for several centuries, when the doctrines of the Unity of God and Humanity of Christ have been freed, not only from the gross corruptions of the dark ages of Popery, but likewise from the less obvious errors, which were retained by the most enlightened of the Reformers; when these doctrines have been reconciled to the language of Scripture and the principles of reason; when a few men are so fully convinced of their truth and importance, that they have courage to profess them openly; and when mankind are alarmed at the progress which these sentiments are making. We appear to be come to the beginning of a new æra in the Christian church, the commencement of a Reformation, as remarkable and important, as the Reformation from Popery, and which will, in the course of time, eclipse the glory of that event; the

the first rescuing us from the errors of the church of Rome only partially; this, entirely; the one being the dawn of day, the other the meridian light.

Let every one hasten to apply his hand to so important a work, and endeavour to share in the honour which will arise from it. Let him furnish his mind with the knowledge of the truth; profess it without disguise or fear; labour to communicate it to others, by public instruction, by private conversation, and by the distribution of useful books. If the harvest be great, while the labourers are few, this should be considered as a motive, not for despondency but exertion; for the fewer workmen there are in the field, the more will every one have to do, and the greater will be the honour which each will enjoy. Were they more numerous, the exertions of a single person would be overlooked.

But there are more important considerations to stimulate our endeavours, than the hope of honour. We are called upon to rescue mankind from errors, which are highly injurious to the improvement or comfort of those who embrace them, and which, if they continue to be retained by Christians, will sink their religion into universal contempt among men of knowledge and reflection. We are required, by presenting to men a rational system of Christianity, to stop the rapid progress of infidelity, which, if it became
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general and permanent, would be the greatest calamity that could befall mankind. If we be friends to the welfare of the human race, if we be actuated by genuine benevolence, we shall engage with zeal in so important and useful a service.

Although we are few in number, we have no reason, on that account, to despair of success. Great effects have risen from small and inconsiderable causes. The little cloud, no bigger than the size of a man's hand, swelled, until it had covered the whole heavens; the grain of mustard seed, which is the smallest of seeds, becomes the greatest among herbs; and a little leaven leaveneth the whole mass. By a few Apostles, aided indeed by the influence of miraculous powers, the ancient empire of idolatry was overturned, and the Christian religion established in the world. By a few reformers a great part of the Christian world was rescued from the grievous yoke of Popery; and by a few persons, equally courageous and active, may the work, which they left unfinished, be completed, and thus the remains of error and superstition be banished from the earth.

F I N I S.

